Reading Response #1 – Powerpoint and EVAL Booklet

EC&I 809

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A key factor in the difference between research and evaluation is research produces general knowledge while with evaluation the knowledge generated is intended to be put into use. It is a necessary goal for evaluation that its results be used to “make a difference”. Programs need to be evaluated to improve practice, to “modify or adapt practice to enhance the success of activities”, “to assess effects (see how well we are meeting objectives and goals), to provide “evidence of effectiveness” and accountability, and in circumstances, to convince or persuade policy makers that additional resources are required to maintain the integrity of the program. The six steps of Underlying Logic points out how the entire process of program evaluation needs to be thoroughly considered. The idea of a cycle is important because the end result of the evaluation needs to be “well-focused”, yet without the results being used, it will serve no one.

As well, four identified standards for “Effective Evaluation” must also be considered. They include: *utility*, *feasibility*, *propriety* and *accuracy*. These four standards are necessary to ensure that all the needs of intended users are met, that the evaluation is realistic and diplomatic while being conducted legally and ethically and with thorough consideration to those involved and those affected. These standards must also be in place to ensure that the evaluation reveals and conveys technically accurate information.

Effective evaluation begins with identifying stakeholders and getting them involved in the process. Stakeholders may include: persons directly involved in the program such as staff, persons affected or served by the program such as clients or students, and persons who are the intended users of the findings such as policy makers and administrators. It is important for the success of the evaluation that any identified stakeholders be involved in all facets of the process including: describing activities and priorities, defining problems, selecting evaluation questions and methods, interpreting findings and what constitutes “proof of success” and implementing the results.

Several methods of evaluation exist. Process evaluation may be used to assess the extent to which procedures were carried out according to a written program plan.

Impact evaluation assesses whether the program has had an immediate influence on the individuals involved. To assess whether the program has achieved long-term objectives Outcome evaluation may be used. Key is that the evaluation process should not be separated from the development of the program itself!

A needs assessment will provide an opportunity to consider what you really hope to “get out” of or learn from the evaluation. Steps in the consideration are: identifying both strengths and weaknesses, identifying priorities and opportunities and challenges.

Four possible evaluation frameworks exist for program evaluation. With the assistance of an evaluation consultant, Empowerment evaluation is designed to guide participants, program providers, etc. through critical self evaluation and reflection such that people help themselves and improve their programs. It can be coupled with other evaluation tools such as a *logic model* (flow chart) and is intended to be a type of democratic process involving all stakeholders. This type of evaluation involves developing a mission or vision statement (to determine focus), reviewing the current practices and ranking them by level of importance, planning for the future direction of the program and keeping focused and on course (involves keeping proper documentation of the program and organization ‘workings’).

Specifically designed for public health programs, the CDC Framework identifies the four standards mentioned earlier. The CDC framework also encourages involvement from its stakeholders and again uses the idea for a logic model that could be used to illustrate the features of the program and how they are connected. A key point raised was that data “is essential for ensuring that the results of the evaluation are useful for stakeholders”. After gathering credible and ethical evidence, conclusions must be justified. Through the evaluation, critical analysis and synthesis of the information can be made. This analysis is then shared with the program stakeholders, and these findings are used to guide decisions or actions that will affect the program.

The Participatory model involves many people in the process and the evaluations are based on taking direction from or working with the people directly involved in the program. While generally led by a steering committee, this is a flexible framework but can be quite costly and time consuming. This would involve gathering input from stakeholders and analyzing the information building towards a collective agenda or consensus.

When reading through the various evaluation frameworks, the Evaluation model seems to mimic what we have done with our school’s SIP (School Improvement Plan). As a staff we have developed a mission and vision statement, identified strengths and weaknesses and taken stock of what is important for us to achieve with our school and its students. Taking note of the fourth step in this framework, I see that we have some work to do in “keeping on course” with our plan. This is something for me to consider as we work continually to improve the learning environment for both staff and students. As a teacher and department head, how do I address this area in our school? I don’t see us at the point to make any decisions about how or when we will know that we have reached our goal. More importantly, a question I have to further investigate is how do we monitor this process?

When reading the slides from the power point, I think what struck me most about them was how this has connected to the Assessment for Learning (AFL) program that the Ministry of Education has implemented in our provincial high schools. I have been involved in this program for about 6 years and have not ever really stopped to consider all of the factors that are mentioned. In the Math AFL, which is the program which I have been involved in, questions based on the curricula are created and administered to students along with a survey, etc. The goal of the program is that schools and school divisions use these results to improve student learning and instruction. As these assessments are developed comparably every two years, there is also an ability to track changes in results of different groups. In addition to considering why to evaluate, the consideration of all of the stakeholders involved was something that I plan to look into further. This is where the section on dissemination connected for me. In the development of assessments, the consideration of who needs to be informed of the information is crucial as well as how the information is relayed to all involved. How do we involve stakeholders in implementing the results?